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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL UNFICYP CY TU
SUBJECT: TURKISH MFA "FORWARD-LOOKING" ON CYPRUS

REF: A. ANKARA 1455
¶B. NICOSIA 656

Classified By: Political Counselor Daniel J. O'Grady for reasons 1.4(b),
d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On October 23 the Turkish MFA hosted an internal marathon session devoted to Cyprus that was refreshingly critical of Turkish policy over the past decade, reaffirmed that the status quo is unacceptable and resolved that Ankara must "find ways to break the deadlocks" that threaten the negotiations. The MFA cautioned us not to read too much into the session, whose attendance was deliberately packed to dilute the influence of UN Permanent Envoy Apakan, who remains determined to have a voice in Cyprus policy. Ankara still hopes to encourage greater USG involvement in the talks. The MFA also is "cautiously optimistic" that the European Court of Human Rights will rule November 16 that the Turkish Cypriot Property Commission is an acceptable remedy for Greek Cypriot property claims in the north. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On October 27 MFA's Deputy Director General for Cyprus and Greece, Kerim Uras, provided us a readout of the marathon session focused on Cyprus that took place at the MFA October ¶23. Uras noted that almost a dozen ambassadors had been brought back for the meeting, and that most of the upper level of the MFA also had attended, essentially "paralyzing" the MFA decision-making structure for almost 24 hours. FM Davutoglu and Minister for EU Affairs Bagis joined the meeting at 10 p.m., and it continued until 4 a.m. on October 24, Uras said. Despite the momentous trappings of this event, he cautioned that we should not read too much into this meeting. It had been scheduled at the behest of UN Permanent Envoy Ertugrul Apakan, who is intent on keeping involved in the Cyprus issue. To blunt Apakan's influence, the MFA leadership packed the meeting with additional attendees. The result was a logistical headache but a surprisingly useful exchange of blunt views, according to Uras.

¶3. (C) Highpoints of the session include:

-- an assessment that Ankara needs to encourage the USG to take a closer interest in the Cyprus talks. The MFA has the sense that the USG feels it got "burned" in 2004, so therefore prefers to leave the negotiating to Cypriots alone. However, this gives the Greek Cypriot side too much room to maneuver. Closer interest from the USG would "make a huge difference."

-- strong criticism of Turkish policy on Cyprus over last the ten years, where it now finds Greek Cypriots inside the EU and the Turkish Cypriots at a severe disadvantage. "How did we get in this position?" was the dominant lament, Uras said,

noting that the clear implication was that hardliners such as Apakan had steered the policy into the corner where Ankara now finds itself.

-- a consensus that opening up the Green Line has had an unfortunate, albeit revealing, effect. The Turkish Cypriot community is convinced that most Greek Cypriots are "racist" and loathe the Turkish Cypriots. Greek Cypriots have a deliberate policy of never buying anything in the north, even bringing their own lunches. According to "TRNC" records, some 40 percent of G/Cs have never visited the north at all.

-- a recognition that too many Turkish Cypriot concessions will make a deal too hard to sell in the north during a referendum. Unlike 2004, Turkish Cypriots will be far more skeptical about what is being offered, and a majority "yes" vote cannot be taken for granted. Therefore, Ankara needs to move carefully.

-- a major focus on November 16 when the European Court of Human Rights will rule on whether the Turkish Cypriot Property Commission is an acceptable remedy for Greek Cypriot property claims. Uras projected that this court decision will have a significant impact on the talks, and that this is why the Greek Cypriot side has moved slowly on this issue. He said Ankara is now "cautiously optimistic" that the court will rule in Turkey's favor. The court has seen that this Commission has been active since April 2006, already has distributed 26 million pounds, and has settled 77 claims (out of 422 that were submitted). Uras said the Commission recently reached a settlement with a single Greek Cypriot property owner for 12 million pounds, freeing up 45 pieces of land in the north.

¶4. (C) Uras said the session's conclusion was that Ankara is not happy with the status quo, and needs to be "flexible and forward-looking," and that it must "find ways to break the deadlocks" that threaten the talks. He said the meeting had underscored that Turkey's EU bid serves as the context for its interest in seeing the Cyprus Problem resolved. We pressed him on whether the session had discussed options in the event the talks fail. Uras said it had not.

¶5. (C) Uras had been far more downbeat the previous week, complaining that ROC President Christofias's UNGA speech had advocated "autonomous regions" instead of "constituent states" -- a substantial weakening of the negotiating premise. Uras also had suggested that Christofias no longer appears serious about the talks, and may be looking ahead to the April 2010 elections, which "PM" Eroglu is expected to win. Eroglu does not even speak English. He is also on record as favoring the status quo, so could not possibly be a credible negotiator. Uras predicted the Greek Cypriots would choose that moment to withdraw from the negotiations, blaming the Turkish Cypriots.

¶6. (C) Uras suggested that the USG should inform the Greek Cypriots that it will not oppose recognitions by other countries of the "TRNC" in the event of the talks collapsing. We were firm that would not happen. Uras continued that if the talks fail Ankara "probably" would encourage its friends to establish embassies in north Nicosia, but doubts that any -- even Azerbaijan -- would have courage to do so. All would fear the consequences of alienating the EU, he said.

JEFFREY

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